SALES PEOPLE JUST NEED TO START DOING A BETTER JOB

Sales staffers will need to get around to doing a better job in working with those people who are responsible for booking groups. We have written about this a number of times in this column. The subject just keeps coming up, and maybe because we have more and more new sales people working at properties who have not had any sales training prior to getting their jobs. Or, perhaps, have not attended any sales workshop programs offered around the country during conventions and conference.

Anyway, of course, sales are better all around, and have been pretty good for the past few years with higher occupancy and rates. However, has it all really been so good because our sales people are doing a better job or are there other factors? Now, we really do not know what the future holds for our hospitality industry. Next year and the year after could very well be OK as far as our business goes; however, there is a good chance that some properties, in some locations will become overbuilt. In addition to that, the economy may worsen, and the cost of fuel may still be high, thereby affecting travel. We have to prepare ourselves to improve productivity, and that means to get some training on how to work with your prospective group buyers.

It just never seems to stop; you just can’t please everyone; and it seems that everyone wants to complain; at least that’s what we hear from sales people. But, let’s stop and listen for awhile to our prospective buyers and learn what they say about sales people. Sometime, last year MeetingNews magazine conducted a survey of some of their readership which included 342 meeting planners working for companies as well as for associations. A lot of them had complaints about how sales people do their work; obviously they selected the wrong meeting planners to survey. Here are the top six complaints:

- Calls/e-mails not returned in a timely fashion
- Cold calls/e-mails with no knowledge of meeting profiles
• Poor communication/follow up by sales person with conference services person
• Lack of creative thinking/alternatives offered during negotiations
• Often dealing with a new contact at a property due to high turnover
• Proposals that don’t properly address all the RFP items

These six areas of sales involvement with prospective buyers would be an excellent start-up kit for properties to use as an outline for an in-house training program. There is just not enough of on-going training at properties. It is easy to create a “do-it-yourself” two-hour session once a week. First, put together your sales team, plus even a couple of department heads to meet once a week for a couple of hours. Alternate department heads every week so that you get different departments covered. Start with a brainstorm session on just one of the six issues listed above. Discuss why the group thinks each issue came up by the buyers, and then all should participate in how to remedy the situation. Each week handle a different issue. When you run out of the six, contact me and I’ll send another half dozen. Just keep the training going.

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